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SUBJECT: CODEL JACKSON-LEE HEARS OF DUBAI'S AMBITIONS TO BE AN EXAMPLE OF MODERNITY

Classified by Charge d'Affaires Martin Quinn, reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶1. (C) Summary: Representatives Sheila Jackson-Lee (D-TX) and Adrian Smith (R-NE) reviewed Dubai priorities with Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Mohammed al-Gergawi (Chairman of para-statal Dubai Holdings and key aide to Dubai Ruler and UAE VP and PM Mohammed bin Rashid) on September 3. The virtual tour of Dubai through the mind of one of its young yet influential masterminds focused on modernity as a counterweight to extremism. Education, economic opportunity, and a taste of the good life are keys to steering young Arab minds towards tolerance and peace, according to Gergawi. Dubai uses these "soft elements of power" to leverage investments for the social benefit of the region, he concluded, while also grappling with the needs of a large foreign labor pool. Gergawi recommended that the U.S. rely more on its own "tremendous soft power" in the region. He noted U.S. visas as an impediment to educational exchange, and agreed on the importance of encouraging Sudan to work closely with the UN. End summary.

¶2. (C) Expressing thanks for Dubai's hosting of many U.S. Navy ships, interest in cooperating with Dubai businesses, and concerns about political incitement among Arab youth, Jackson-Lee asked Gergawi about Dubai's priorities. Gergawi gave a rousing endorsement of Dubai's economic growth, multi-ethnic tolerance, and appreciation of visitors. He noted the importance of the CODEL seeing Dubai in person rather than solely through the media.

¶3. (C) The UAE is a young country that only had 45 college graduates (5 women) when it gained independence in the 1970's, said Gergawi, boasting that now it has the highest percentage of female matriculation to college/university in the world (92%). "Neither of my parents went to school," he added, so homework was not a priority during his somewhat "primitive" upbringing. The UAE has nonetheless become a much-needed example of modernity in a rough region; the Arab world will need to create 80 million jobs in the next 10 years, he asserted, without which it risks its youth turning to extremism.

¶4. (C) Education is key to creating wealth through human capital. Many Emiratis have benefited from an American education, and Gergawi hopes to see more U.S. universities open branches in the Arab world to "open minds" through the "soft power" of high quality education. The \$10 billion Mohammed bin Rashid Foundation (MbRF) -- an initiative close to Gergawi's heart and over which he has authority -- seeks to expand knowledge in the Arab/Muslim world. Programs are designed to create young leaders, offer scholarships, and promote change. Dubai sends a clear message that "humans can live together" by hosting over 200 nationalities without sectarian incidents or religious tension. Indians and Pakistanis clash in their homelands, he said, but not in Dubai where both are heavily represented. Dubai is actually a haven of peace which displays the advantages of modernity

-- an image uncharacteristic of stereotypes of the Middle East. Once people experience modernity, "they can't go back to extremism."

15. (C) Others look to the UAE and seek to copy its success. The Dubai School of Government, in collaboration with the Harvard's JFK School of Government, focuses on increasing the skills of public sector participants from around the region. Dubai uses these "soft elements of power" to project its goals of prosperity, tolerance, and transparency. Dubai's investments in Tunisia (\$14 billion recently announced) are designed to create business, jobs, and better education, he emphasized, as are similar programs in Morocco. Students from those countries are sponsored for study in the U.S. (including "200 to Harvard") on the condition that they return to build their homelands after graduation.

Unfortunately, he said, 80% of Arab students in the U.S. do not return home. Expanding the number of Arabs in their home countries who have a positive image of the U.S. is also in America's interest. Over 200,000 students in Sudan are being educated through UAE investments as well.

16. (C) Gergawi said that when others questioned his work ethic (many long hours), he said his was not a job, but the pursuit of a better region, a peaceful world. He could not afford not to dream big, even when ambition got the UAE into trouble as in the case of Dubai Ports World. He noted that Dubai seemed to offer the safest port for U.S. Navy ships, yet DP World faced prejudicial treatment (for "security" reasons) when it sought to invest in U.S. ports.

17. (C) Dubai is a regional hub and city of merchants accustomed to a cosmopolitan atmosphere, said Gergawi, leveraging its ample resources of sand and sea to "create

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hope through economic opportunity." Young Arab talent needs such an atmosphere in which to blossom, he believed, and to turn away from extremism. Dubai should be appreciated by America for using "soft power to our common advantage." He urged the U.S. to use its "tremendous soft power" to gain influence and support moderates in the region, rather than focus on military power.

18. (C) Jackson-Lee endorsed the need for educational exchanges and prompted Gergawi to review the UAE's commitment to security, human rights, and better conditions for foreign labor. Gergawi cited the recently-passed export control law (signed by President Khalifa August 31) as a concrete example of cooperating internationally on security. He said trafficking-in-persons and labor present challenges to many countries. The UAE has stiff rules to control abuses, yet faces the challenges of a young nation growing at a compressed pace. Labor unions are not permitted, but the right to adequate living and health conditions is assured. Violations are investigated and taken to court. Over 250 investigators (of 2,000 planned) are monitoring the labor situation with increasing attention, he emphasized, adding that much of the abuse laborers face is from agencies in their home countries. We must consider "why do people want to come here" and not blame the UAE for having attractive economic growth; corrupt brokers take advantage of the desire of workers to seek a better life.

19. (C) Use of young boys as camel jockeys is now banned, Gergawi continued, and seizure of a worker's passport is illegal. The UAE is pressing for a streamlined method of ensuring that salaries are paid promptly. As the UAE works to close the loopholes that have been exploited to the detriment of workers, it also grapples with the question of expanding democracy. People need "a certain level of modernity" before it is in the national interest to hold elections, he said. The UAE is now in the education phase. Once a certain "level of lifestyle" is established, people will be prepared to vote rationally and not resort to extremism through the ballot box.

¶10. (C) Representative Smith agreed that investment and partnership are good for an economy, noting the labor shortage in his own Nebraska district. The CODEL and Gergawi expanded on education exchanges, all agreeing on the importance of more young minds having a shared experience as part of their leadership training. Gergawi again called for "creating synergies" in cases where investment can be leveraged as "soft influence for change." He cited a number of fellowship programs with which the MbR Foundation is cooperating and highlighted U.S. visas as a critical impediment to educational exchange. Noting the visa obstacles since 9-11, Jackson-Lee said, "You have advocates in the Congress" on that issue. She also sought sponsorship for a group of small business owners from the U.S. to visit the UAE to see first hand the benefits of partnership.

¶11. (SBU) Jackson-Lee called upon the UAE to offer any encouragement possible for Sudan to cooperate more closely with the United Nations. Gergawi accepted the advice.

¶12. (U) CODEL Jackson-Lee did not have an opportunity to review this message prior to departure from the UAE.

¶13. (U) This is a joint Abu Dhabi / Dubai cable.  
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